

1578 / 6144
ABOUNDING INIQUITY,

AND ITS

FATAL CONSEQUENCES:

A

S E R M O N.

PREACHED AT

KIRKCUDBRIGHT,

The twenty-seventh of February, 1794;

Being the Day appointed for

A G E N E R A L F A S T.

BY THE REVEREND ROBERT MUTER, D. D.

MINISTER OF KIRKCUDBRIGHT.

*Dī multa neglecti dederunt
Hesperia mala luctuosæ.*

HOR.

D U M F R I E S :

PRINTED BY CUTHBERT McLACHLAN.


1794.

Sold by THOMAS M' MILLAN, Bookseller, Kirkcudbright;
W. CHALMERS, R. CLUGSTON, and E. WILSON,
Booksellers, Dumfries.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.



THE

GEN

Kirk

havin

your

W

disco

distar

my o

duce

I fear

I

oppo

in th

ful a

KIRK

APP

TO THE HONOURABLE
THE MAGISTRATES AND COUNCIL OF KIRK-
CUDBRIGHT.

GENTLEMEN,

THE following SERMON, which was preached at Kirkcudbright on the General Fast, in February 27. 1794. having obtained your approbation, is now published at your particular desire.

WHEN I had the honour, Gentlemen, to deliver this discourse in your presence, I did not entertain the most distant thought that it was to extend beyond the limits of my own parish: But your partiality for your Minister induced you to confer encomiums upon the discourse, which, I fear, may not be bestowed by the world at large.

I embrace, however, with the greatest pleasure, the opportunity that is now afforded me, of expressing to you in this public manner, my sincerest esteem, and most grateful acknowledgments. And with the greatest respect,

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient,

And most obliged servant,

KIRKCUDBRIGHT,
APRIL 26. 1794.

ROBERT MUTER.

7

And

T

on

dis

ins

dis

tun

to

bu

wi

ren

the

MATTHEW XXIV. 12.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall
wax cold.

THE words of the text were spoken
by our blessed Lord, and addressed
on the following occasion, to his own
disciples :—

JESUS had gone up to the Temple to
instruct the people ; and having ended his
discourse, the disciples took the oppor-
tunity, as he was departing, of remarking
to him the grandeur of that magnificent
building, with all the splendid ornaments
with which it was adorned. From this
remark, our Lord takes occasion to lead
their thoughts from the buildings of the

Temple, to a subject infinitely more important in itself, and more interesting to them. He tells them, that the days were fast approaching, when that stately and magnificent structure, which they now beheld with such admiration and astonishment, should be so completely demolished, that not so much as one stone should be left upon another, that should not be thrown down. And when Jesus had retired from the city, and sat down upon the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately, and entreated him to inform them, when these awful events should happen, and what should be the sign of his second coming, and of the final dissolution of the world. Upon which, our Lord opens the future scenes of divine Providence, and exhibits to them an awful prospect of the miseries of all succeeding generations, to the end of the world: describing them by figures, drawn from the impending destruction of Jerusalem, and the civil government of the Jews, which were to be the beginnings of sorrows. “ Nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom ;

“ and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places: Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.”

ALTHOUGH these awful predictions were soon to be realized in the total destruction of Jerusalem; yet, through the whole of this prophetical discourse, it is plainly intimated, that the same destructive causes which overthrew the kingdom of Judea, would continue to overthrow every other kingdom, to the end of the world.

“ AND because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

FROM these words of our Lord, I shall take occasion to shew you,

First, THAT iniquity has not only abounded in times past, but does in fact, much abound at the time present.

Secondly, I SHALL point out the fatal consequences of iniquity abounding in a nation, empire, or kingdom.

Lastly, I SHALL draw these instructions, which the truths that may be offered, should impress deep upon our hearts.

I AM, 1st. to shew that iniquity has not only abounded in times past, but does in fact, much abound in the time present.

It is indeed much to be lamented, that, notwithstanding the various means which divine Providence has employed for reclaiming mankind from the error of their ways, the world should still be wicked, and still iniquity should continue to abound. Yet, every age has remarked the prevalency of vice, and to the righteous it has occasioned just cause of sorrow and regret. If we go back to the ages before the flood, we find the corruption of man-

ners thus described: " And God saw
 " that the wickedness of man was
 " great in the earth, and that every
 " imagination of the thoughts of his heart
 " was only evil continually. And it re-
 " pented the Lord that he had made
 " man."

SOLOMON, that accurate observer of
 the manners of the times, gives many
 similar descriptions of abounding iniquity
 in his days. " And moreover, says he,
 " I saw under the sun the place of
 " Judgment, that wickedness was there ;
 " and the place of Righteousness, that
 " iniquity was there—Because sentence
 " against an evil work is not executed
 " speedily ; therefore the heart of the
 " sons of men is fully set in them to
 " do evil."

IN the succeeding periods of the Jewish
 Church, we find the Prophets, who were
 raised up of God to stem the torrent of
 vice, continually bewailing the progress

of iniquity, and severely reproaching the people for their profligate morals and worthless conduct. And even at the beginning of the gospel dispensation, the Jewish nation, instead of improving by the many signal judgments they had experienced during a long succession of ages, had in fact, grown worse and worse. The little religion that was retained amongst them, had degenerated into mere superstition. The most empty forms, and frivolous ceremonies, were substituted in place of the most essential duties ; and the weighty matters of the law, genuine piety, and moral virtue, were almost totally neglected. In a word, pride, impiety, and corruption, universally prevailed, and proved at last the final cause of their utter destruction.

NOR did iniquity abound less amongst the Gentiles in those days, than amongst the Jews. They are represented by the Apostles as worshippers of idols, dead in trespasses and sins, foolish, and disobedient, full of envy and murder, and serving diverse lusts and pleasures.

Thus has iniquity long prevailed in ages past ; but why it should have been permitted in this manner to abound, it is impossible for us to give an account. Our finite understandings cannot comprehend all the ways of an infinite and unerring Being. We must wait with patience till that final day shall come, when emerging from this infant state, with powers more enlarged in the next, all the profound mysteries of the divine administration shall then be thrown open, and discover that perfect wisdom, which at present we cannot possibly explore.

BUT how much the present times are chargeable with abounding iniquity, will evidently appear, if we reflect on the prevailing vices which characterize the present age.

AND I observe, in the 1st place, that there runs through all ranks of men a strange, and most unaccountable inattention to Almighty God. By various interposing objects, he seems to be almost

thrown quite off the intellectual eye.—whi
 From whatever cause this may proceed, age
 experience demonstrates the fact; namely, ing
 that an habitual sense of the supreme whi
 Being does by no means universally pre- the
 vail. A belief of his Being, Perfections, my
 and moral government, is not indeed pub- pra
 licly renounced amongst us, as seems to cla
 be the case with the people of a neigh- It
 bouring kingdom. They, alas! have ex- ran
 pelled the belief of his existence from in
 amongst them, and of course, have refus- be
 sed the homage that is due to him. What
 Being do they worship? What God do
 they adore? Alas! they have murdered vi
 his Priests, plundered his Temples, and of
 stained his Altars with blood. th
 God forbid their example should be a pattern in
 to us, or that we should ever copy their o
 impious manners. But though we have not
 renounced the belief of a divine existence;
 yet it is to be feared, it wants that com-
 manding influence which this belief should
 produce upon the heart. From this cri-
 minal inattention to the Almighty, pro-
 ceeds that irreverence for his sacred name,

eye.— which seems to characterize the present
 proceed, age. Hence the custom of profane swear-
 namely, ing, so prevalent amongst us; a custom
 preme which, carried to its utmost extent, leads
 y pre- the impious wretch not only to blasphem-
 ctions, my, but to perjury also. Is this profane
 d pub- practice, however, confined to the lower
 ms to classes of the people only? By no means.
 neigh- It prevails equally amongst the higher
 ve ex- ranks, who, from the stations they hold
 om a- in society, are bound to set them a much
 refu- better example.

What
 d do
 dored
 and
 l for-
 ern to
 r im-
 e not
 ence;
 com-
 ould
 s cri-
 pro-
 ame,

To the same cause must we ascribe the
 violation of the holy Sabbath, the contempt
 of the sacred ordinances of religion, and
 those sarcastic sneers at the inspired writ-
 ings, which are so common with the wits
 of the present age.

AMONGST the ancient Heathens, many
 excellent laws were enacted for the pro-
 tection of religion, and the severest penal-
 ties were inflicted upon those who reviled
 their gods, or ridiculed the ceremonies of
 their worship. And shall we, who live in

the more enlightened periods of the gospel, treat with contempt these truths which we profess to believe, or profanely abuse that name which we ought to adore? Irreverence for the name of God, produces disrespect for religion; and both united, open a door for every species of immorality.

To this contemptuous disrespect for Almighty God, I must join, in the next place, as another distinguishing feature of the present age, the want of gratitude to heaven, for that abundance with which this nation has been blest. What an unnatural return is this for the gifts which God has so liberally bestowed upon us? What a strange perversion of the grateful feelings! when that which should draw them ardent forth to God, is suffered unhappily to extinguish them in the heart: when that which ought to awaken the remembrance, is permitted to obliterate a sense of the giver.

e gos- ALTHOUGH this is not the tendency,
 s which or ought to be the effect, of the gifts which
 abuse God bestows; yet if these are unremarked
 e? Ir- as flowing from his all-gracious hand, it
 oduces must of necessity, be the natural conse-
 nited, quence. Did we, from a supreme regard
 of im- to Almighty God, always connect our bles-
 sings with the hand that kindly administers
 them, then would they be received with
 or Al- gratitude, and embraced with joy. But
 place, the gifts of heaven being conceived by a
 f the corrupt age, as conferred by fortune, be-
 o hea- stowed by chance, or as the fruits of its
 h this own industry, present not the hand that
 atural really administers them. Hence they can
 d has neither be received with thankfulness, nor
 hat a used with discretion. Fancy, appetite,
 ings! and passion, are easily enflamed; and meet-
 rdent ing with no check from lively gratitude to
 o ex- God, they convert the favours which he
 that bestows into the means of corruption. The
 ance, age in which we live, ignorant of the cause,
 f the or at least inattentive to the source, from
 whence their abundance flows, are equally
 regardless of its use and application.

WE need not have recourse to suppositions to illustrate the case: there are facts innumerable to the point. Experience demonstrates how wicked we are become. What pride, vanity, intemperance, and debauchery, may we observe around us? These are the vices which characterize the present age. These are the vices which deaden reflection, and push us forward in that sinful course, to which passion impels, and affluence enables us to pursue.

BUT, in the next place, if we turn our attention to the lower orders of life, still we shall find iniquity no less abounding in these, than in the more exalted ranks. The vices that distinguish the former, though somewhat different from these, that characterize the latter, are however no less pernicious to the interest of the individual, than destructive of the good of society. If we judge of their pious sentiments from their moral conduct, how ignorant in general shall we find them? How unsolicitous about their eternal wel-

fare, and how regardless of those truths that would conduct them to it! How turbulent, peevish, and discontented with their allotments in life! How fraudulent, insincere, and unjust, when opportunities favour them! How unguarded and irreverent in their expressions of Almighty God! In a word, when secrecy promises concealment, how unjust to man; and even when darkness cannot cover, how unmindful of God!

It is painful to remark, and difficult to recount, the numberless vices with which the present age abounds. In short, when we reflect on that general depravity which pervades every rank of life, with great propriety may we apply the words of the prophet to ourselves. "We are a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters; we have forsaken the Lord, we have provoked the holy one of Israel unto anger." It is, indeed, a mournful reflection, to think how much corrupted

we are, and how sadly degenerated from the pure spirit of that religion which we profess to believe. And, notwithstanding all our boasted refinements in arts and civilization, how little we have improved in these excellent virtues which adorn our characters—as men, and beautify our profession—as Christians.

I NOW proceed, in the 2d place, to point out the fatal consequences of abounding iniquity in a nation, kingdom, or empire.

MAN may be considered in two different views, either as an individual, or as a member of society. As an individual, his happiness consists in the approbation of his own mind, and a sense of the divine favour. As a member of society, his happiness results from the undisturbed possession of all his natural and acquired rights; that is, from the protection of equitable laws, and just government. As an individual, he renders himself unhap-

py, only when he deviates from the path of virtue, and the fear of the Lord. As a member of society, he renders not only himself unhappy, but others also; when, instead of discharging his duty as becomes a good citizen, he violates the laws both of God and man.

RELIGION and virtue are the firm foundations upon which human society and government can alone rest secure. By restraining all irregular passions, and strengthening the social affections, they unite us close to each other in the bonds of amity and love. The more powerfully their influence prevails amongst the various individuals, the greater benefit must redound to the community at large. Society, which is made up of many individuals collected together, reaps the advantages which arise from the pious labours of all its members. And as each, singly, is rendered better by the principles of religion, the whole must proportionally flourish. But if the fear of the

Lord is thrown off the mind, or if religion is expelled, or has lost its influence with the people, then a door is opened for every species of immorality. Then are the sacred laws, of truth and sincerity, justice and humanity, violated—then are the bands of society relaxed, and the pillars of mutual faith and confidence amongst men, shaken and broken down. Even the security of laws themselves must fail. For what avail the best laws that ever were framed for preserving order, and securing the peace of society, if the enforcements of religion are wanting. Laws twisted about the necks of a corrupt people, will never bind them to duty: They may compel them to evasions, but they will never constrain them to virtue.

SUPPOSE iniquity was to prevail so universally amongst the members of a community, that no fear of God was left, no sense of religion retained; nay, that it was banished from amongst them, as

in the national convention of France—
 what would be the consequence? The
 love of many, as our Saviour says, would
 wax cold: Hatred, animosity, jealousy, and
 suspicion, would enflame the breasts of
 men, and tear them asunder from each
 other. Hence injustice, rapine, violence,
 perfidy, and treachery, would press their
 way; and in their train would follow
 wild confusion, disorder, anarchy, and
 rebellion. Hence would succeed the hor-
 rors of war, and the carnage of battle;
 the rage of the victor, and the groans
 of the vanquished—parents bereaved of
 their children, and children deprived of
 their parents; and a thousand other woes,
 which the lawless, resentful passions of
 men occasion.

THESE, in the natural course of things,
 are the fatal consequences of abounding
 iniquity. These are also infallible proofs
 of divine vengeance being let loose upon
 the nations of the earth.

FOR it is worthy of remark, that the conduct of Providence towards individuals, and societies of men, is often, in this world, widely different. Sometimes his blessings are so indiscriminately poured out upon the former, that we can scarce judge of God's love or aversion, from any thing that befalls them at present; but with regard to the latter, his smiles or his frowns are always conspicuous, from their prosperous or depressed circumstances. Individuals must hereafter appear at the bar of heaven, and according to their behaviour in this life, they shall all stand or fall by themselves in the next. But the other world knows nothing of human societies, or political associations. The chain that now links them together, will hereafter be broken, and never again will be united. Hence it is, in this life only, they can be either rewarded or punished as a nation, for their good or bad actions.

at the
ividu-
n this
es his
oured
scarce

THAT this is the general course of divine Providence, in the present government of the world, the experience of all ages sufficiently demonstrates.

n any
but
es or
from
cum-
r ap-
rding
shall
next.
g of
ions.
ther,
again
s life
d or
d or

CONSULT the annals of the world—consider the rise and fall of ancient nations, kingdoms, and empires. Read particularly the history of the Jews:—Here you will find the conduct of Providence towards this nation, was uniformly suited to their manners: Now in prosperity, then in adversity. One while flourishing as a great nation, and again carried away into captivity, according as their piety prevailed, or their virtue declined.

THE same was the case with the other nations of antiquity. Whilst Rome revered her gods, and maintained her virtue, the republic waxed strong as iron,

as the prophet expresses it. The people flourished, and grew up to a mighty nation; but no sooner did she abandon her religion, and relax her morals, than her power declined, her empire sunk, and her government was overturned.

IF we descend to our own times, we shall find the Almighty still pursuing the same course at present, which he did in times past.

HAVE we not an awful example before our eyes, of a nation, formerly reckoned one of the most polished, and civilized in the world, now through abandoned impiety and wickedness, sunk into the most savage brutality? Who can contemplate, without horror, their profest Atheistical principles, their atrocious deeds, their barbarous cruelties, and their acts of morality written in blood. They have

banished religion, and rejected every motive to virtue. Hence all the ties of affection are loosened amongst them.— Murders and assassinations have usurped the place of brotherly love, and tender attachment. Neighbour plunges his dagger into the breast of neighbour, and the most exalted in rank are brought to suffer upon a scaffold. Wild confusion perplexes their distracted councils, and fearful suspicion disturbs their jarring factions. Their wretched government, founded upon the principles of impiety, and reared up by a most lawless banditti, already feels some convulsive motions, and ere long, must tumble into ruin.

SUCH are the consequences of abounding iniquity in a nation, kingdom, or empire. That people who venerate God's name, and obey his laws, he renders great, prosperous, and happy. That people who disown his being, and disre-

gard his authority, he punishes with the most tremendous judgments ; that all the world may know that the most High ruleth in heaven above, and on earth below.

THIS is the course of divine Providence ; and this course he will follow to the end of the world.

LET statesmen and politicians speak as they please, of the advantages of wealth, of the extension of commerce, and the improvements in arts and ingenuity. Still it will be found, that religion and virtue alone constitute the real strength, and true glory of a nation. And, according to the degree in which their influence prevails, they raise human societies out of that depth of corruption into which iniquity plunges them, and carry them forward to that great epocha, “ When nation shall no more rise up
“ against nation, nor kingdom against

“ kingdom ; and when there shall be
 “ nothing to hurt or destroy in all the
 “ holy mountains of God.”

I SHALL now, in the last place, draw those instructions, which the truths I have offered, should impress deep upon our hearts.

1st. A PEOPLE abounding with iniquity, must sooner or later work out their own ruin : They cannot, as a nation, long exist ; for their own internal corruption will finally overthrow them : besides, they stand continually exposed to the just displeasure of Almighty God. Far be it from us to deal out the judgments of heaven ; yet, this much we may certainly say, that such a people cannot, in the time of their distress, look up to heaven for protection, unless a deep sense of their apostacy from religion, and a sincere purpose of amendment, are formed.

To humble ourselves, under a penitent sense of national sins, and to implore the divine Majesty to avert those dreadful judgments, which our manifold transgressions have justly deserved, is the purpose for which we are called together on this day; and surely no day can ever be unseasonably appointed for such an end.

2dly. Lest some individuals should suppose themselves but little concerned in this matter, let me advise them, to consider, that national sins are nothing but the accumulated vices of individuals. You may think perhaps, that you have but little connection with the present, just, and necessary war, in which the nation is now engaged; a war, that seems to involve in it the lives, property, religion, and liberties of every British subject. But if you are indifferent about religion, or if you have cast off all fear of God, and plunged yourselves into these vices which are peculiar to your station,

then ought you to reflect, whether you are not assisting in filling up the measure of national depravity.

A GENERAL reformation, is a reformation of the individuals, operating at large throughout every part of the community. A return to God, from whom we have departed; a return to virtue, from which we have declined, is a cause in which every individual amongst us, is personally concerned. A reformation, therefore, is promoting both a private and public interest. Hence because religion is an object of public importance, let us not infer from thence that it is of less concern to individuals.

WHAT is society, but an association of individuals, for their mutual advantage? Has not every single member his particular place and station in it? Is not his interest inseparably connected with the happiness and prosperity of the whole

community? If abounding immoralities weaken the social affections, if they involve a people in war and bloodshed, is not each individual called upon to reform his wicked life, and contribute all he can for the re-establishment of religious principles, and virtuous manners?

Lastly, LET us keep this constantly in our minds, that repentance and amendment, are the sole conditions upon which we can look up to God for protection. In vain shall we trust to the bravery of our fleets and armies—In vain shall we depend upon the wisdom of our National Councils, if the aids of Omnipotence are with-held. “ Except the
 “ Lord do build the house, they labour
 “ in vain that build it : Except the
 “ Lord do keep the city, the watch-
 “ men watch in vain that keep it.” Without his protection, all the efforts of man must prove unsuccessful.

IF
 stret
 for m
 put f
 charg
 to th
 will t
 He
 deliv
 Britis
 PRO

If then, we prepare our hearts, and stretch out our hands to the Almighty for mercy and assistance, let iniquity be put far from us. Let us faithfully discharge all the duties we owe to God, to the public, and to ourselves—then will the Lord delight to dwell among us: He will become our shield and our deliverer; and finally, will bless the British Isles with the return of PEACE, PROSPERITY, and HAPPINESS.

F I N I S.



90093933

